

## Good Stories for Children

By Walt McDougall

Karl Hopfschmir  
Beards the  
Savage  
Spookissimus in  
His Lair in the  
Bungstarter Forest  
and  
Overcomes Him

THIS is the somewhat curious story of Karl Hopfschmir, who told it to me after he returned from Germany. He was the son of Gustave Hopfschmir, and he was called "Is-that-so-Karl," because he was always asking that question and also testing the truth of every queer statement which he heard. At the time this story begins his Uncle Hans had told him that if he cut a snake in half it will join itself together again before sunset unless you smash its head. Karl promptly hunted up a garter snake, cut it in half and watched it until 9 o'clock at night, and found that it did not join, and that it cannot, either. So he proved that statement untrue, whereas most boys would have believed it without questioning it at all.

Next day he had a talk with old Caspar Heimholtz, the cobbler, who told him another snake story. It was that a horse hair placed in water would surely turn into a hair snake. Karl tried it, and while he was watching the water I came along, and when he had revealed to me the object of his experiment I told him that the hair snake, so called, is a thin black worm that comes in the abdomen of the common cricket, and often when the cricket dies it manages to get into the water to lay its eggs, most likely. He went for some crickets at once, and promptly found in several of them the hairlike worm; so he proved I was right, as usual, for I never make a statement unless I know it's so. Old Caspar was much surprised and exclaimed: "Donner! but you are a schmart boy, ain't it?"

So you see this habit of asking and doubting sometimes is of value, but it may be overdone, of course.

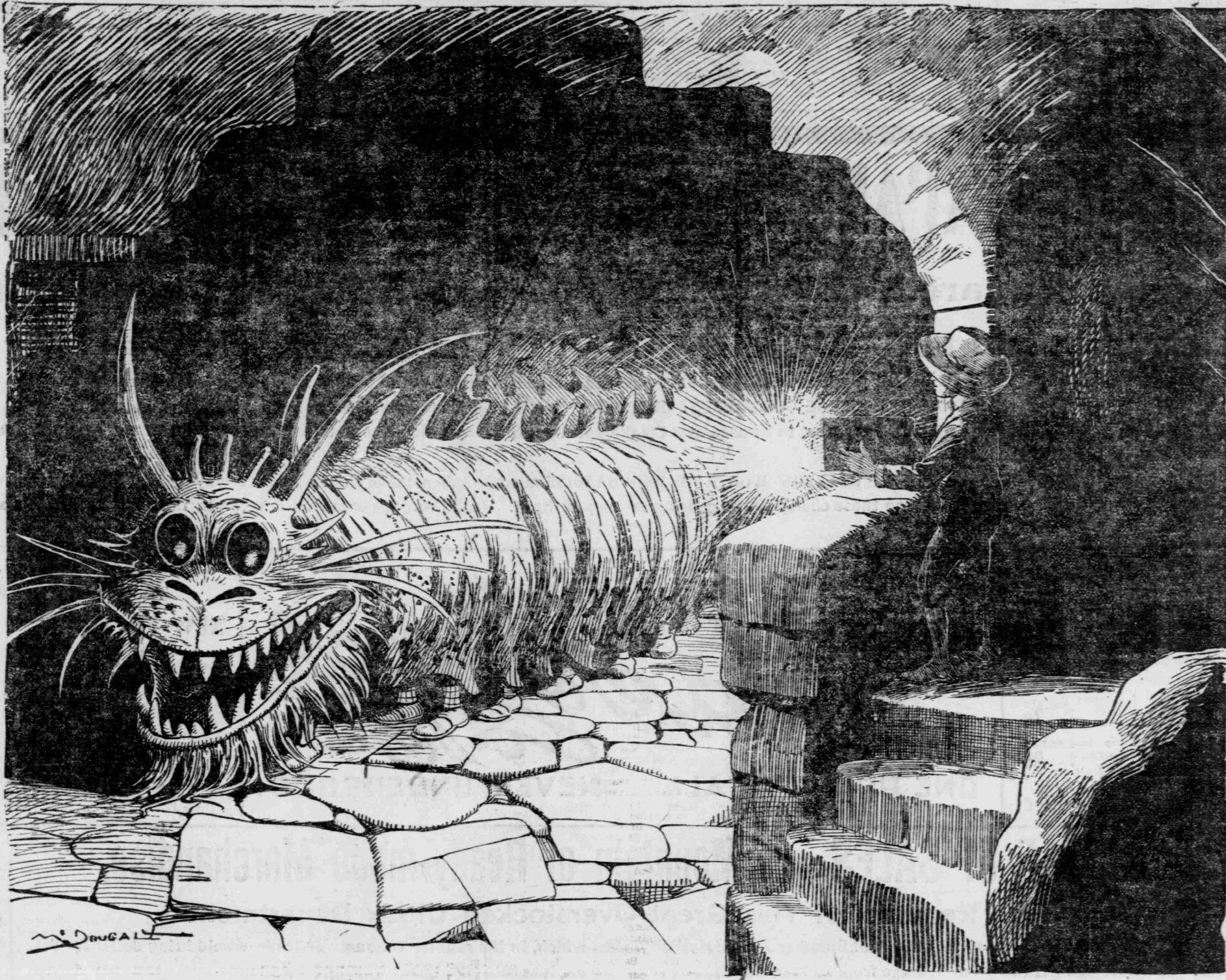
Well, not long after this, as a result of snooping around looking into queer things, he quite accidentally discovered a wash that would cure mosquito bites, and his father went to work making it and putting it in bottles, so that in less than a year he was worth more than ten million dollars, for it only cost six cents a washbottle, and he got one dollar for a two-ounce bottle. Then the family moved to town and in the summer went to Europe and astonished their relatives in Hochderkaiser and Göttingen, Germany.

Now, just before they went to Europe this summer Karl had a long talk with old Caspar, the cobbler, who was very fond of the boy, and he told him all about his childhood home, asking him, if he had time, to go there and see his friends and relatives. They lived, he said, in a great forest far from any cities, and were very old-fashioned folk, just the same as they had been centuries ago before steam cars, bicycles or folding beds were invented. Karl said he would be glad to call on them, so Caspar gave him a letter to his brother Ludwig, who was a brewer, and who brewed a beer so fine that it never was known to the outside world, for his neighbors jealously prevented it being famous by drinking it all as fast as he brewed it. So this summer he went to Bungstarter Forest, which is the name of the great woods on which Mr. Ludwig Heimholtz lived and did his brewing. He had to drive many miles in a funny old-fashioned coach, for there are no railroads or telegraphs, and the people are so far behind the times that they believe in witches and the evil eye, and put horse shoes over their doors to keep such things away. Karl found the old brewer as fine a man as his brother the cobbler, and when he had managed to read the letter, the first one he had ever had, as they have no post office or mails in Bungstarter Forest, he smiled and welcomed the American boy very cordially indeed, for he was the first who had visited that country. He asked him to stay with him in his quaint old house, built two hundred years ago, and Karl gratified him by accepting, although it was difficult at first to get used to sleeping in summer with a featherbed beneath him and another on top, as is the fashion in the remote parts of Germany. But he had lots of fun there when he became acquainted with some of the children of the woodland, for they were so simple that they believed everything anybody told them, and never dreamed of inquiring into the truth of a statement. They fully believed that darning needles sewed your ears up, that toads will make warts on your hands if you pick them up, that every snake in the woods is poisonous, that bats will get into your hair if you give them the least chance, that cats will get on you in your sleep and take your breath away, that to spill salt, go under a ladder, see the new moon over your left shoulder, sit with thirteen at the table or let a person come between you and another when walking will bring the most awful bad luck, as well as a thousand other foolish and silly beliefs that people of sense or education no longer pay the least attention to at all. He tried to tell them that all such silly fancies were long ago proved to be the veriest nonsense, but the old-fashioned children said that their fathers and mothers believed these things, so they would also believe in them. Well, at last, when he found that even their elders still believed the earth was flat instead of being a sphere, he gave them up in despair, but still he had lots of fun with them.

## Brewer Ludwig Gives a Great Picnic

After he had been there a fortnight Brewer Ludwig gave a great picnic in Bungstarter Forest, and invited everybody for miles around. They all came, and it was a wonderful sight to see them together. They danced and played many games that Karl had never heard of, games forgotten everywhere else in all the world. The men shot at a mark with their ancient flintlock guns and held a beer-drinking contest, which was won by Heinrich Fromenstaler, who drank sixty-nine mugs, and he wasn't feeling very well either. Then, late in the day the great feast was spread on the green grass beneath trees a thousand years old. There was limburger, swissese, noodle soup, pretzels, weinerwurst, pumpernickel, zwieback, weinerschnitzel, upfalkuchen, sourkraut, kartoffelsalat, may-wein, weisbier and a hundred other dainties all new and strange to Karl. He and the others ate of every dish, and when all was gone there was nothing to do but lie in the grass, and, indeed, that was all anybody wished to do.

After a while Karl took a stroll in the darkening woodland all alone, and he had not gone very far when he came upon a



## IT WAS THE SPOOKISSIMUS

ruined castle, whose great walls were covered with moss and from the tower of which trees were growing. He wandered all around the castle, for he had never seen such massive ruins. He was, as usual, very curious as to whose castle it had been and what its history was, and finally he went back to the picnic party and asked some of the older children about it. They shuddered when he mentioned the ruins, and then some of the elders, hearing his questions, showed as much alarm and fear as the children had. Even Ludwig turned pale when he was asked to tell the story to his American friend, and for a minute could scarcely speak.

Then he opened his mouth to begin, but hesitated and stammered, while many of the picnicers hastily departed, for they dreaded to hear the castle mentioned. Then Ludwig said:

"Ach, I cannot do it here in the woods! To-night I will tell you all."

The picnic broke up, and it seemed as if a gloom had been cast over all, for they went home silent and depressed. That night Karl asked an explanation, for he was greatly mystified. Ludwig reluctantly began:

"It was a great many years ago—yes, centuries ago, I suppose—that the castle was built by Baron Morganthaler, which means Morning-dollar. He was so-called because everybody had to pay him a dollar every morning, which made him fabulously wealthy, for a dollar, you must know, was then worth ten times what it is to-day. He was a robber-baron, and all the poor people feared him immensely. For many years he oppressed all the dwellers in the forest; then one day the Valkyries, the dread maidens of the thunder cloud, came and snatched him one night in the midst of a terrible storm and carried him to the top of Mount Penchleberg, from whence he was dashed into the dark and bottomless valley of Kummelheim. He was never seen again, and no one came to claim nor inhabit the castle, which finally went to ruin, as you have seen it."

## He Finds the Great Spookissimus

"Well," said Karl, "there's nothing so wonderful about that story. I can't see why you were all so scared to-day."

"There is more yet, already," added Ludwig, glancing carefully around and lowering his voice. "Since about twenty years ago something has come to dwell there in the ruins!"

"What is it?" asked Karl.

"It is the Spookissimus."

"Is that so?" said Karl. "Well, what is a Spookissimus?"

"Don't speak the name so loud!" said Ludwig, anxiously. "It is a terrible thing as big as four ox-wagons that roams the forest at night and slays all it finds abroad."

"Does it come into the village?" asked Karl. "Have you ever seen it yourself?"

"Yes; twice. But I escaped by keeping quiet. Each time it happened that I was lying by the roadside taking a rest on my way home from a feast at the Burgomeister's, and it saw me not, but hurried on after other feasters who were better able to walk."

"What was it like?"

"Oh, like nothing in all the world. It was thirty feet long if an inch, and it had an enormous head with horns! Its eyes were deep, black holes, from the depths of which gleamed lights like the glow worms—such lights as hover over murderers' and suicides' graves. Smoke that smelled sulphurous rose from its red nostrils, and its groans and cries were like those of an animal from the Pit."

"I'll bet it was only a rhinoceros," said Karl, incredulously, for he had read so much about animals and seen so many in all the museums that he didn't believe in such a creature as the good old brewer described.

"Well, I saw it myself, and many others have seen it. It is there yet, and at night it often roams through the village and opens windows, stealing food and clothing—in fact, anything that is handy."

"Oh, it does, does it?" cried Karl. "That's a funny sort of animal! Does it steal your beer?"

"Many a barrel," answered the brewer. "I don't care, as long as it spares me. It's a terrible thing, and we fear it beyond anything in the world."

"I shall try to get a peek at this Spookissimus," said Karl, determinedly.

"For goodness' sake, don't think of such a thing!" cried Ludwig. "It will get you before you know where you are!"

"Not while I have seven shots in my revolver," replied Karl;

"and it will have more holes in it than those in its head with the glow worm lights, also. You bet I'll look it up and take a photograph of it beside, for I have my suspicions that it is only a hokus-pokus."

"Whatever awful being a hokus-pokus is, this Spookissimus is to be feared and avoided!" cried Ludwig. "I shall not consent to let you monkey with it!"

Now Karl saw that he was in earnest, so he said no more, but next day, hearing old Ludwig remark that he had no more snuff, and that which was sold in the little woodland village was not fit to use, he decided to drive to Liverwurst, the nearest town, which was ninety miles away, and purchase some for the old man. He announced the object of his journey, and the brewer protested against his driving so far for such a trifle. Karl replied:

"That's nothing. In America we often journey a thousand miles just to call on a friend or attend a rummage sale."

He started out that evening. When they had gone some ten miles some rough-looking men came out of the woods and stood in the road some distance in advance. Karl got out his shooting irons, but the men only inquired as to the health of the visitor from America, and said they were anxious to see what an American looked like.

"When do you return?" one asked.

"Next Thursday evening," replied Karl; but he knew that his horses were so fast that he would get back on Wednesday, but he suspected these men. They seemed so wide-awake that he was sure they were no honest Bungstarter woodsmen, as they pretended, for had they been they would have been in bed long before and sound asleep now. His driver, Adolph, also thought that they appeared very suspicious, and wanted to return at once and get a policeman, but when Karl showed him that there were no policemen in the village he was glad to drive on. In Liverwurst Karl bought a five-pound box of the very finest snuff in the world, which costs a ven more than hard coal, and immediately started on the return journey. Nothing happened until they arrived in the vicinity of the Morganthaler Castle quite late on Wednesday night, and as the road lay very near the castle he resolved to alight and take a look at it.

He instructed Adolph to remain in the shadow of the tall timber by the roadside until he returned, and, taking his camera, as well as a couple of flashlight powders, he climbed the hill until he saw before him the dark, mossy walls, silent and solemn in the white moonlight that silvered every ivy leaf.

## Ventures Boldly Into the Cave

He walked to the ruin, and soon was gazing down into a gloomy opening like a vault, which he imagined must be the retreat of the awful Spookissimus, for he had seen no other opening. Without hesitating he descended into it. The moon poured its rays into its depths, but it was only near the entrance that he could see anything. Yet, as the floor was level, he had no difficulty in walking along the cavellike passage. Nothing, however, was visible, and he was turning to make his exit, as an actor would say, when three men came down the steps leading into the vault. Karl crouched against the side wall and felt steps there, which he immediately ascended, and found himself in a little room or closet in the wall, from which he could look down upon the men. They lighted torches at once and moved off into the depths of the vault. In a few minutes, while he sat still considering what he should do, several other men entered, and then a group of six, who stood and talked right in front of his hiding place. They spoke of the success of the recent robbery of a farmhouse a few miles away, thus showing what they were to the hidden listener, who began to suspect what the cause of all the queer stories about the haunted castle. As they stood around an ancient horn lantern he could see their faces quite plainly, and, to his surprise, he recognized several of the villagers who had attended the picnic in the woods, as well as two of the men who had stopped his carriage. He made up his mind that they were bold and reckless robbers, who met nightly in the vault and terrified the more simple villagers by making mysterious noises, and pretty soon he began to feel less frightened and resolved to give them a good scare in return. He silently placed his flashlight powders on the narrow ledge of the wall before him, and then, thinking that he might as well utilize the opportunity by taking a photograph, he prepared his camera, but just when he was ready a whistle sounded in the corner of the vault, where most of

A Brave American  
Boy Showed  
That the Monster  
Was Only a  
Disguise for a  
Band of Robbers  
Who Had  
Created Terror

the men were collected, and all repaired there at once, leaving Karl alone.

From the back of the vault soon came awful groans, howls and snorts, as well as laughter and jeers. What the robbers were doing, of course, was not apparent to Karl, but they were evidently preparing for an expedition, for he could hear their chief ordering them to hurry, as it was growing late. He dared not leave his place to steal nearer, but was obliged to sit still and await events. They were not long, however, hurried as they were by the leader, and soon two of them reappeared in the front part of the vault bearing torches that lighted up the whole cavern so well that Karl could see everything quite plainly.

Then, from the inner darkness appeared an awful object, so awful in appearance that at first Karl, who was not expecting anything but men, was startled and shuddered, but on carefully scrutinizing it as it came out he very quickly lost all his fear, and then he laughed to think he had been frightened. It was an enormous head with horns of brilliant red, and down in the depths of the eyeholes he discerned dull-gleaming spots like phosphorus just as are made on your hands when you rub old-fashioned sulphur matches upon them in the dark. The thing's mouth opened and shut and showed great white, uneven teeth that looked as if they could snap a man's head off in one bite. The body of the animal followed slowly, fold after fold, for yards and yards, and he could plainly see the feet of many men showing beneath its belly, shuffling clumsily along the uneven floor in the darkness.

"Aha!" said Karl to himself with a grin. "This is the awful Spookissimus that is scaring all Bungstarter Forest!"

"Are you all ready?" asked the leader, who stood just at its neck, where a fold of the green cloth, of which the animal was made, showed an opening for him to enter the head and direct all its movements.

"Wait a little," answered a voice back in its belly. "I made a mistake already. I am a left leg to-night, and I should be a right one yet!"

"Never mind. You can be a left leg for a change once," growled the chief. "We must be moving."

He slipped into his opening, and Karl could just see his big feet under the hairy chin of the monster.

"Now," thought he, "this is my time to set off my fireworks," and, scratching a match quickly, he lighted the flashlight powder.

The vault was filled with a blinding flash, a dazzling glare like lightning, that revealed every crack in the old walls. The sudden brilliance startled the robbers in the Spookissimus so that many of them fell upon their knees in terror. The captain, who could see out of the eyeholes, caught the full brilliancy of the flash and was almost blinded, as so many are when they see it for the first time, and he endeavored to get out, but couldn't find the opening in the neck. Karl thought of the box of snuff in his coat pocket, and, instantly removing its cover, he hurled the contents right at the eyeholes of the Spookissimus. The snuff shot into the great hollow head and quickly filled all of the long, winding cloth body, and all the men began to dance about and sneeze with all their might. Convulsion after convulsion of sneezes shook them and in their struggles they neezed the Spookissimus snuff about nine hundred pieces. It was very strong, powerful snuff indeed, and when they got clear of the entangling folds of the green cloth they had hardly strength to crawl out of the vault into the night air and flee down the mountain side. In a few minutes Karl was all alone in the vault, and far away in the darkness of the forest could be heard sharp, agonizing sneezes as the robbers made their way to their homes. Then he began to be aware that the snuff was rising even into his hiding place, and he, too began to sneeze, but it settled down soon, and he carefully made his way out, stirring up a cloud of snuff, but holding his nose as he walked. He went back to the carriage and found Adolph very much alarmed at the awful sounds he had heard, which seemed to him to come from a pack of wolves who had an attack of hay fever. Then they drove to the house of Brewer Ludwig. When Karl told him what had happened he was amazed, and didn't know what to be most astonished at—the fact of robbers in Bungstarter Forest or the American boy's bravery and cleverness. There was a little of the snuff left in the box, and he had to take a big pinch of it to settle his nerves, but after forty or fifty good sneezes he recovered his composure. Then Karl developed his photograph and showed him how the awful Spookissimus had been operated by the bold robbers, who had so terrified all the villagers. The picture was so good that, although only the legs and feet of the robbers showed, anybody in the village could recognize them at once, for in Bungstarter people wore the same clothes for many, many years, and their trousers and coats were as familiar to the neighbors as their faces were.

## How the Burgomeister Waxed Wroth

So the Burgomeister was called in and the picture shown to him. He broke into an explosion of wrath at once, saying that the good name of the village was gone, and that the whole world would point the finger of scorn at them, which was funny when you recall the fact that nobody had ever heard of the village. The irate Burgomeister called in some of the villagers whose trousers did not show in the picture, and they formed a committee, which went around to all the houses, and whenever they found a man in bed sleeping off an attack of the sneezes he was promptly arrested and taken to jail, so that all of the robbers were very soon in custody. Then they gave Karl a vote of thanks, after which they made a bonfire of the ragged remains of the much-dreaded Spookissimus. The result of Karl's brave venture was that in all the village schools it was always afterward taught that there are no such things as Spookissimuses, goblins, witches nor vampires, all of which had been believed in before; and now, wherever you go in Bungstarter Forest, you will find that even the smallest children run about in the darkest night without the least fear of meeting any of these things.